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OFFICE OF  
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

O. N. E.  
MEMORANDUM

*Intellectual Dissent in the USSR*

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22 February 1973

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# CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 February 1973

### INTELLECTUAL DISSENT IN THE USSR

*The vigorous and varied efforts that Soviet authorities have undertaken against intellectual dissent in the last few years have left the dissidents weakened, discouraged, and on the defensive. Internal political considerations, however, are likely to limit the degree of repression the regime can impose upon its intellectual critics. The regime has also shown itself more sensitive than in the past to foreign opinion about the handling of internal dissent.*

*In the setting of a policy which looks to the opening of wider and more diverse contacts with the West, the Soviet leadership will probably be more anxious than before to maintain internal discipline but may find it necessary to choose its means more carefully -- lest it jeopardize both détente and its own hopes of acquiring technological and scientific know-how from the West. The important long-range question may not be the fate of the existing dissident movement as such, but whether underlying dissatisfactions will grow and generate new impetus for change within the system.*

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*This memorandum was prepared in the Office of National Estimates and discussed with appropriate offices in CIA, which are in agreement with its principal judgments.*

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THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF DISSENT

1. *Origins.* The protests in the mid-1960s over the arrest and trial of the dissident writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuly Daniel marked the beginning of a more active and political phase of intellectual dissent in the USSR. Criticism through literary symbolism and allegory was overtaken by more outspoken forms of protest: occasional public demonstrations by small groups; and publicized letters, petitions, and manifestos. Dissident documents, which began by addressing specific grievances, soon came to advocate broad programs of political reform. *Samizdat* ("self-published") literature proliferated and also became more political, the most remarkable example being a regularly distributed periodical, the *Chronicle of Current Events*, which gathered news of dissent and repression from various parts of the country, furnishing the dissident movement with an element of cohesion and continuity.

2. It soon became apparent that the writers and artists hoping for freer expression had been joined by others in the Soviet intelligentsia who wished to raise additional issues: scientists seeking expanded communication with the non-Soviet world; nationalist groups wanting more autonomy; members of religious sects advocating the freedom to proselytize; and radicals espousing structural changes in the political system. The

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regime provided a common target for all these groups, and the fuller discussion of all issues in a liberalized political atmosphere became a shared goal. The dissenters' explicit appeals for broader civil rights and democratization often rang with a strong moral tone and voiced an eloquent challenge to Party primacy and orthodoxy.

3. At times the regime seemed to be taken aback by the dissenters' boldness and persistence. The clamor over the Sinyavsky-Daniel affair probably caused second thoughts within the political leadership about the advisability of holding well publicized trials.\* On several occasions the angry outcries of eminent academicians and scientists apparently influenced the Kremlin to release well-known dissidents from psychiatric hospitals. Despite its difficulty in deciding how to cope with the problem, however, the regime remained fundamentally unyielding in its attitude.

4. *The Dissidents under Pressure.* The regime possesses, of course, a number of overwhelming advantages in its contest with the dissenters. In fact, however, it has chosen to deal with the problem on a piecemeal basis, using indirect measures in many cases, and direct, heavy-handed

\* Yury Andropov, appointed KGB chief in 1967, is rumored to be against such trials on the ground that they provoke further dissidence.

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actions in a limited number. The degree of tactical success it has achieved in this way owes much to the inherent weaknesses of the disparate dissident elements. Most of the intellectual dissenters eschew the Leninist principles of disciplined, hierarchical organization, adherence by all members to one dogmatic program, and the single-minded purpose of seizing political power as incompatible with their aim of opening up and modernizing Soviet society. Moreover, their movement is essentially elitist and has only limited popular appeal. (The available evidence of what might be called blue-collar dissent makes it clear that ordinary workers tend to resent the privileges of *all* favored segments of Soviet society, including the intelligentsia, and their complaints and dissatisfactions have little to do with civil and human rights.)

5. Various kinds of harassment (including searches, confiscations, and interrogations) and warnings of administrative actions (including loss of job) have served to hamper dissident activities and have probably kept many sympathizers from becoming actively involved. Some well-known dissenters have refused to be cowed by indirect pressures, and they have been removed from circulation. A number, including poet Iosif Brodsky and mathematician Aleksandr Yesenin-Volpin, have been permitted or encouraged to emigrate, and physicist Valery Chalidze was recently

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deprived of his Soviet citizenship while on a lecture tour in the US.\* Others, including former Army general Petr Grigorenko, who provided a degree of leadership for the dissident movement in the late 1960s, have been imprisoned or placed in psychiatric institutions. Those whose terms of imprisonment have expired often do not return to active dissidence (normally they are banished from Moscow or, as in the case of Sinyavsky, they seek exit visas). Still others are subjected to a combination of penalties; Vladimir Bukovsky, a longtime activist, was sentenced to two years in prison, five in a camp, and five in exile.

6. *The Samizdat Journals in Jeopardy.* The example made of Bukovsky certainly bodes ill for Petr Yakir, a leading dissenter arrested last June. Yakir's fate is of particular importance because his arrest came in the midst of an intensive KGB campaign ("Case 24") against the surprisingly successful and long-lived *Chronicle of Current Events*. Yakir, the son of a prominent general shot by Stalin and rehabilitated by Khrushchev, has long been a key figure in the journal's underground network. Reports that he has weakened under the pressure of alcohol

\* Novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, fearing a similar fate, refused to go abroad in 1970 to receive his Nobel Prize. Biologist Zhores Medvedev, whose book *The Medvedev Papers* critically examined Soviet censorship practices, departed last month with his family for a year's stay in Britain, knowing that he may not be permitted to return to the USSR.



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deprivation and has revealed the names of his associates have understandably distressed dissident circles in Moscow.\*

7. "Case 24," according to the *Chronicle*, was launched about a year ago by a decree of the Central Committee, an action that testified to the grave concern of the Party leadership. The journal managed -- with some interruption of its regular bimonthly schedule -- to survive through 1972, publishing five numbers. Perhaps its network is now fairly broadly based and compartmented, and perhaps its publishers already have taken precautions to protect the journal from Yakir's possible revelations. But the arrests of Yakir, Viktor Krasin, and other important individuals, plus the threats of further reprisals against others, have apparently taken their toll. The last issue appeared in the fall, and the next is long overdue.

8. Other *samizdat* journals with different interests and purposes have appeared in recent years, but they too have had a rough go of it. The radical *Democrat*, for example, asserts the necessity of forming clandestine political organizations in active opposition to the regime.

\* Several reports indicate that "Case 24" may be winding up its investigative phase prior to a trial focused on Yakir. So far, accused dissidents have defended their actions in court, but Yakir may make a public "confession."

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It advocates the escalation of dissent beyond the usual tactics of "legalist" actions, theoretical discussions, and the dissemination of uncensored news. By contrast, ventures like the *Chronicle*, though clearly underground activities requiring secrecy and precaution, are not aimed at open political opposition to or forcible displacement of the Party.

9. But the most interesting of the other periodicals has been the *Political Diary*, a monthly that began publishing shortly after Khrushchev's fall in 1964 (more than three years earlier than the *Chronicle*) but -- for reasons that are not clear -- was made known to the West less than two years ago. It was indicated at that time that publication of the journal was being suspended or stopped. This journal has served as a forum for relatively candid discussions of domestic and foreign political questions, such as shifts among Kremlin leaders, cultural controls, Sino-Soviet relations, and disarmament. The tenor of the articles in the representative issues seen in the West is clearly Marxist, albeit critically and liberally so, and its small circle of writers and readers probably has included Party members.

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CONTINUING SOURCES OF DISSENT

10. *The Specter of Nationalism.* Several other *samizdat* journals that have appeared in the 1970s reflect strong national feelings. The *Ukrainian Herald* is similar to the *Chronicle* but concentrates on events in the Ukraine, and *Exodus* has provided a means of expression for the active Jewish nationalists. Both journals find the struggle for civil rights and political liberalization congenial to their political preferences and useful in furthering specifically national concerns. This mingling of nationalism with the civil rights movement has heightened anxiety in the Kremlin about both problems.

11. Ukrainian nationalism has been the target of the most severe blows in the regime's recent crackdown. Last year scores of Ukrainians, including Vyacheslav Chornovil, a journalist who had written about the trials of Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1960s, were arrested, and a number of long sentences (up to 15 years) have been meted out. Petr Shelest, the republican Party chief ousted last spring, among his other sins evidently tolerated a degree of local nationalism that did not sit well with his Politburo colleagues. Since his removal authorities have cracked a sterner whip over Ukrainian dissidents and curbed expressions of Ukrainian nationalism.

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12. Expressions of nationalism have sometimes led to antagonism between dissenters. Certain exponents of Russian nationalism, for example, have used their own *samizdat* journals to give vent to anti-democratic, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-semitic feelings. But there have also been instances of mutual sympathies and cooperation, as when Grigorenko, a Ukrainian, sought to help the Crimean Tatars return to their homeland from exile in Central Asia. Nationalism remains a strong force in the USSR and could provide an important link between dissenting intellectuals and other elements of the population that might otherwise remain indifferent.

13. *Exodus*. Jewish nationalism poses a unique problem for the regime, and the Kremlin seems to be having trouble getting a firm grip on a force whose growth and direction apparently took the Party leaders by surprise. Individual Jews have always made up a substantial portion of the dissident movement. But the revival of Jewish national consciousness and pride, which gained impetus from the Israeli military victory in 1967, brought about an increase in underground activities and attention focused on Israel. In the wake of a government crackdown beginning in 1970 many Jews began to concentrate their efforts on a new aim: emigration. In 1972 alone more than 30,000 Jews left the Soviet Union for Israel.

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14. The regime allowed this migration to develop and continue largely because it hoped to defuse Jewish dissidence without resorting to increased internal repression and to avoid further tarnishing of the Soviet image abroad, which could retard the momentum of détente. Still, the Kremlin has attempted to control the flow in several ways. Jews who apply for exit visas often face immediate loss of job. Invitations from relatives abroad are needed to leave the country (the rationale of family reunions being more acceptable to the Soviet government than other reasons). The disillusionment of the relatively few Jews who seek reentry into the USSR from Israel has received recent attention in official propaganda. And last August a tax reimbursing the state for the educational expenses of emigrants was decreed (the fee involved for a highly educated specialist reportedly runs into tens of thousands of rubles). In practice, however, this obstacle is frequently overcome by one means or another, and the number of Jewish emigrants in 1973 may well match last year's figure.

15. Soviet dissenters have long supported emigration -- by Jews and others -- on the ground that it is a basic human right. But the Jewish exodus has contributed to the enervation of the dissident movement. The departure of activists has the immediate adverse effect of reducing the dissenters' ranks, and many of those who remain shift their interest

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from improving their lot in the USSR to efforts aimed at getting out.

16. The relative success of the Jews at forcing the Kremlin's hand could encourage other national groups to behave militantly. But the Jews are something of a special case. Other national groups do not enjoy the foreign resources available to the Jews, and most of them do not have a homeland outside the USSR to draw their populations.\*

17. *The Scientific Elite -- Privileged but Discontented.* Another group that creates special problems for the regime is the scientists. Within the new technical elite, educated under Soviet rule and pampered by material advantages, there have developed political attitudes every bit as tainted as those of the liberal writers -- and perhaps more threatening politically. Certain prominent scientists have extended their concern beyond pleas for freer international exchanges and communication to active and public protests regarding civil liberties. A bold sense of social responsibility has led a few to devote more energy to this political struggle than to their scientific labors.

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\* *Some Central Asians have alluded to the prospect of Chinese help from across the border in an eventual showdown with the Russians. Some Soviet Armenians have talked of going to Turkey, and a number of ethnic Germans have been permitted to leave the USSR for Germany.*

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18. Although the size of the scientific elite has grown rapidly because of the Soviet stress on technical education, the importance of the scientists lies less in their numbers than in their potential influence. They are often concentrated in major cities or "academic towns" and have ties with intellectuals in other fields. The scientists are also among the most sophisticated members of Soviet society, and the political leadership of the country is not a faceless "they" to the top academicians, who are in some cases personally acquainted with high Party officials. All Soviet citizens are educated virtually to idolize science, and if intellectuals regard certain writers as speaking for the conscience of the nation, an equally widespread feeling is that scientists speak for its future.

19. Perhaps the clearest and most renowned voice of political dissent in the USSR is that of Andrei Sakharov, the brilliant nuclear physicist generally regarded as the "father" of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, who with two colleagues formed a Committee on Human Rights in 1970. Sakharov insists that he aspires to a dialogue with the Kremlin leadership, and he has addressed several appeals to Soviet leaders advocating democratization of domestic politics and rationalization of the economy. But lack of regime response led him in 1972 to publicize abroad a memorandum he had sent to Brezhnev on the eve of

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the 24th Party Congress. The program of reform that Sakharov sets forth in this document is more detailed and demanding than the ideas he expressed in his 1968 essay on peaceful coexistence and intellectual freedom, and it probably resulted from his growing frustration.

20. The Committee -- which specifically excludes Party members -- still meets to discuss and act on civil rights problems, and Sakharov continues to protest silently in Moscow's Pushkin Square each year on Soviet Constitution Day. But Sakharov has found that his influence is negligible, and his less well-known dissident colleagues have not shared his immunity from arrest. His actions could not prevent the trial and five-year prison sentence last fall of Kronid Lyubarsky, a dissident astrophysicist, or deter Moscow State University from suspending his own stepdaughter. A recent attack on Sakharov himself, the first to appear in the Soviet press, portrays him as a politically naive utopian playing into the hands of anti-Soviet elements in the West. It may be a warning that Sakharov's reputation will no longer protect him from personal harassment, or even arrest, if he continues to publicize his complaints.

21. Another physicist, Valery Chalidze, also a charter member of the Committee, has been a leading advocate of the "legalist" approach in political dissent. He has collected information about instances of



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illegality in Soviet judicial practices and tried to use existing Soviet law and the outspoken exposure of injustices to moderate regime behavior. He edited the academically styled *samizdat* journal *Social Problems* and signed his name to each issue to symbolize the claim that his actions were neither anti-Soviet nor illegal. But about a year ago Chalidze ceased publication of the journal, and last fall he quit the Committee after several KGB warnings about his activities and amid rumors of tactical squabbles with his fellow dissidents about his decision to go abroad.\*

22. Despite the theoretical nature of much of their dissent and the ineffectiveness of their efforts to arouse citizen interest in asserting civil rights, the actions and attitudes of the scientists are taken seriously by the regime. At the 24th Party Congress the power of Party organizations to supervise the administration of research institutes

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\* The other co-founder of the Committee, physicist Andrei Tverdokhlebov, has also quit. But additional members of the intellectual elite (including Igor Shafarevich, a widely respected mathematician) have joined the Committee. Solzhenitsyn has associated himself with its work, and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich has signed Committee-sponsored appeals such as the petition prepared last fall supporting amnesty for political prisoners.

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and cultural establishments was broadened.<sup>1/</sup> But the scientists are likely to remain a particularly bothersome thorn in the side of the leadership. Among younger scientists (and probably, as Sakharov claims, throughout the entire intellectual elite) there are many who sympathize with Sakharov and regard parts of the official ideology with contempt. In the 1972 elections to the Academy of Sciences, a body which antedates the Bolsheviks by more than a century, the members refused to fill vacancies rather than accept nominees whose principal recommendation was the backing of the Party.

23. *The Western Connection.* Soviet dissent is basically home-grown. But the dissidents find little encouragement for their ideas in the USSR, and they turn where they can for intellectual, moral, and material support. Like past generations of Russian dissenters they have used ideas and documents from the West to criticize government thought and practice at home.<sup>2/</sup> Chalidze and others have used the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an expression of "civilized norms" to which they would like to see Soviet law and practice conform, and the

<sup>1/</sup> In the months before the congress the Party committee at the Lebedev Institute, where Sakharov used to work and still consults weekly, was taken to task for ideological shortcomings.

<sup>2/</sup> The positive feeling toward and interest in the West, particularly the US, shared by most dissenters stands in contrast to their basic fear and distrust of China.

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Committee on Human Rights has affiliated with the International League for the Rights of Man. The West also provides a channel for publicizing news of dissident activities and regime repression both to sympathizers abroad and, through feedback via Western radio stations, to a sizable domestic audience. Such publicity embarrasses the Kremlin and, according to some reports, at times affords the dissidents a degree of protection from regime actions.

24. The dissenters run considerable risks in maintaining their ties with the West, and the regime demonstrates its appreciation of the relationship by energetically trying to break it. Dissidents have complained about interference with international mail by Soviet authorities attempting to prevent the receipt of items such as UN documents. The jamming of Western radio broadcasts, renewed in 1968, has continued (Radio Israel was added to the list of jammed stations last year), telephone restrictions have increased, and the USSR last fall sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution opposing direct television broadcasts from space satellites into countries that do not want them. The Soviet leaders remember well the importance of foreign support to their revolutionary antecedents. They try as hard to isolate the intellectual nonconformists from the West as from Soviet society.

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25. Moscow has felt it necessary to permit some increase in dealings between Western and Soviet scholars and scientists as a means of gaining information and other practical benefits. But such contacts are viewed by the Kremlin as potential sources of political infection. They expose to Western influence persons particularly susceptible to unorthodox attitudes, and the Party leaders feel they must take steps to inoculate the intelligentsia against this danger. The stricter internal policy of recent years is, in effect, a substitute for the physical isolation of Stalin's day.

### A LOOK AHEAD

26. *Problems Posed by Détente.* But in the 20 years since Stalin's death Soviet domestic needs have altered and the outside world has changed. Both of these conditions figure in Moscow's pursuit of détente. The anticipated expansion of East-West intercourse will, of course, expose many more members of the Soviet intelligentsia to Western contacts. The Kremlin may hope that the West wants trade and détente with the USSR badly enough to overlook its internal campaign for conformity. But Moscow's desire for trade, joint projects, and expanded exchanges of information to keep pace with advancing technology and to boost its economy is certainly strong, and the Soviet leaders have already felt obliged because of Western pressures to moderate certain of their domestic actions.

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27. The Kremlin's handling of the Leningrad hijacking trial in 1970 and its bureaucratic obstacles to Jewish emigration have come under heavy international criticism. Partial blockage of Soviet-American trade in retaliation for the "brain drain" tax has become a real threat in the US Congress. In all likelihood the Party leaders genuinely feel that their rules governing emigration are, as they claim, purely an internal matter. They retain the option to restrict the flow whenever they wish (for example, by requiring closer kinship between prospective emigrants and their relatives abroad). But they also do not want to jeopardize the fruits of détente. Moscow's somewhat uneven enforcement of the decree last year and regularization of certain exemptions and of amortized repayment obligations early this year betray Soviet sensitivity to these foreign pressures.

28. Suppression of dissent and advocacy of détente appear to be locked in mutual contradiction. It is true that in recent years the regime has intensified its efforts in both matters simultaneously. But in doing so it has found that each imposes certain limits on the other. If dissent ever became an actual political threat to the regime, no doubt the leaders would move to meet the threat regardless of the consequences for détente. But so long as intellectual dissent remains more eloquent than effective the interplay is likely to continue. In

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this context, although the basic internal controls over the intelligentsia will remain in force, the regime's considerable commitment to gaining foreign assistance for internal economic development will render it vulnerable in some cases to external influences on its internal policies.

29. *Continuing Internal Constraints.* The Kremlin must also take into account various internal limits on its freedom to tighten the screws on nonconformists -- limits that Stalin was not obliged to reckon with. The Party leadership can ill afford increased alienation within the intelligentsia, especially among the technical elite upon whom it relies for economic progress. And a greatly expanded role for the internal security organs, which would be bound to accompany a policy of extreme repression, could well have far-reaching repercussions within the political system, including the highest levels, that most Party leaders probably wish to avoid. The combination of both foreign and domestic pressures will provide numerous opportunities for contention within the Soviet political leadership over the methods to be used in quieting intellectual dissent, and the Kremlin's campaign against dissidence will probably continue to show signs of improvisation.

30. It can be argued that to some extent the post-Khrushchev leaders themselves have added to the dimensions of the problem by their

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conservative attitudes generally. Yet Soviet intellectual dissent today is not merely a reaction to the clampdown after Khrushchev. The sweeping criticisms of the entire Soviet system by leading dissident spokesmen like Sakharov and historian Roy Medvedev plead for more basic changes than Khrushchev ever contemplated. There is little chance that the myth of Party infallibility can be restored, and the dissatisfactions growing out of the frustration of hopes aroused in the last two decades seem both deep and widespread.

31. Many of the current intellectual dissidents started out seeking to be constructive critics working within the system. But the regime has consistently denied them such a role and thereby has blocked the most logical and direct path for intellectual dissent to take in trying to influence the political leadership to adopt more liberalized policies. Instead, the Kremlin has been hard on those few people of liberal persuasion who had achieved positions of some influence within the establishment. (The most notable casualties were A. M. Rumyantsev, a chief editor of *Pravda* under Khrushchev, who was removed from the directorship of the Institute for Concrete Social Research, and Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the longtime chief editor of the literary journal *Novy Mir*, who resigned his post amid a purge of his colleagues shortly before his death.) The Party since Khrushchev's fall has also reduced the influx

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of the educated intelligentsia into its ranks and has indicated that it rejects any claim the intelligentsia may have to be the most progressive element in Soviet society.

32. *Active Dissent Manageable? Dissatisfaction Not?* So far the campaign to check dissent has been successful. The limits on freedom of expression, which intellectuals managed to push outward somewhat in the 1960s, have been more and more narrowly defined by the regime in the 1970s. The dissidents profess and exhibit continuing determination in the face of their acknowledged difficulties. But the prevailing mood throughout much of the movement is one of frustration and anxiety, and the dissidents do not see at all clearly "what is to be done" to reinvigorate their movement and bring about political change.

33. Active dissent in the USSR is likely to persist in some form, but in the future it may consist of more muted and isolated outbursts of protest and be limited to very small groups of intellectuals. Frustration on the part of the dissenters could lead to the increased radicalization of their views, and the continuation of the regime campaign against activists could drive the dissenters further underground and force them to employ more conspiratorial methods of operation and more devious means of communication.



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34. But the principal moving force for political change in the USSR will probably be a variety of pragmatists within the establishment, such as Party officials and economic managers who become convinced of the need for change in order to meet the demands of economic efficiency and modernization. There is some evidence that elements of the intelligentsia, official as well as academic, are taking an increasingly realistic approach to various problems. Greater flexibility and less attention to satisfying the demands of orthodoxy have been manifested in the past few years in a number of disciplines such as sociology. The regime's general restrictions on freedom of expression are clearly aimed at this broader target as well as at the active dissident movement -- and are probably considerably less effective in this larger sphere.

35. So far the more forward-looking elements within the Soviet establishment have had little apparent influence on the topmost leaders. Even a high-ranking government or Party figure who might be sympathetic to change and experimentation would now have a hard time battling the inertia of his conservative colleagues and the entrenched bureaucracy. But disaffection is likely to grow if the regime persists in its refusal to accept political change, and the dissenters have already posed the basic question at the root of the underlying dissatisfaction: how can rationality and freedom of thought be permitted in the drive for

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scientific, technological, and economic progress, but denied in political, social, and cultural affairs?

36. Indeed, some of the ideas already advanced by dissident groups may be increasingly accepted by figures within the system -- perhaps more or less unconsciously -- simply because so much of the existing method of management and administration works so poorly. In the long run, especially if such a process gains momentum, it will be difficult for the regime to reconcile its resistance to political change with its commitment to modernization. Underlying dissatisfactions and a willingness to experiment may grow even while overt dissent is stifled. The regime, faced with increasing constraints on its freedom of action, may find that its toughest choices in attempting to impose orthodoxy lie ahead.